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THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY:

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THE

RELIGION OF HUMANITY.

An Address

Delivered at the Church Congress,
Manchester, October 1888

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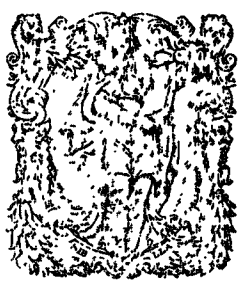
BY THE

Right Hon. ARTHUR J. BALFOUR,
LL.D., F.R.S.



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THE

RELIGION OF HUMANITY.

THE word Positivism, as used by us to-day, I understand to carry with it no special reference to the peculiarities of Comte's system, to his views on the historic evolution of thought, to his classification of the sciences, to his theories of sociology, or to those curious schemes of polity and ritual contained in his later writings, which have tried the fidelity of his disciples and the gravity of his critics. I rather suppose

the word to be used in a wider sense. I take it to mean that general habit or scheme of thought which, on its negative side, refuses all belief in anything beyond phenomena and the laws connecting them, and on its positive side attempts to find in the 'worship of humanity,' or, as some more soberly phrase it, in the 'service of man,' a form of religion unpolluted by any element of the supernatural.

Now I do not propose here to discuss the negative side of this creed. Those who confidently assert, as do the Positivists, that there is one set of things which we can know and do know, and another set of things which we do not know and can never know, evidently suppose themselves to be in

possession of some valid criterion of knowledge. How far this supposition is in their case legitimate, I have endeavoured elsewhere to discuss from my own point of view, in a book the title of which has attracted more interest than the contents. I do not mean to refer to the subject here. What I have now to say relates solely to what may be called the religious element in Positivism, and its adequacy to meet the highest needs of beings such as we are, placed in a world such as ours.

Some will deny at the outset that the term *religion* can ever be appropriately used of a creed which has nothing in it of the supernatural. It is a question of words, and, like all

questions of words, a question of convenience. In my judgment the convenience varies in this case with the kind of investigation in which we happen to be engaged. If we are considering religions from their dogmatic side, as systems of belief, to be distinguished as such both from ethics and from science, no doubt it would be absurd to describe Positivism, which allows no beliefs except such as are either scientific or ethical, as having any religious element at all. So considered it is a negation of all religion. But if, on the other hand, we are considering religion not merely from the outside, as a system of propositions, stating what can be known of man's relations to a supernatural

power, and the rules of conduct to be framed thereon, but from the inside, as consisting of acts of belief penetrated with religious emotion, then I think it would be unfair to deny that some such emotion may centre round the object of Positivist cult, and that if it does so it is inconvenient to refuse to describe it as a religion.

It is doubtless unnecessary for me to dwell upon this double aspect of every religion, and of every system of belief which aspires to be a substitute for religion. For many purposes it may be enough to regard religion as a mere collection of doctrines and precepts. It is often enough when we are dealing with its history, or its development; with the criticism

of documents or the evidence of dogmas. But when we are dealing not merely with the evolution of religion or its truth, but with its function among us men here and now, we are at least as much concerned with the living emotions of the religious consciousness as with the framework of doctrine, on which no doubt they ultimately depend for their consistency and permanence.

Now, as it is certain that there may be supernaturalism without religious feeling, so we need not deny that there may be something of the nature of religious feeling without supernaturalism. The Deists of the last century accepted the argument from design. The existence of the world

showed in their view that there must have been a First Cause. The character of the world showed that this First Cause was intelligent and benevolent. They thus provided themselves with the dogmatic basis of a religion, which, however inadequate, nevertheless has been and still is a real religion to vast numbers of men. But to the thinkers of whom I speak this theory was never more than a speculative belief. The chain of cause and effect required a beginning, and their theory of a First Cause provided one. The idea of an infinitely complex but orderly universe appeared by itself to be unsatisfactory, if not unintelligible, so they rounded it off with a God. Yet, while the savage who adores a

stone, for no better reason than that it has an odd shape, possesses a religion though a wretched and degraded one, the Deists of whom I speak had nothing more than a theology, though of a kind only possible in a comparatively advanced community.

While there may thus be a speculative belief in the supernatural, which through the absence of religious feeling does not in the full sense of the word amount to a religion, there may be religious feeling divorced from any belief in the supernatural. It is indeed obvious that such feeling must be limited. To the variety and compass of the full religious consciousness it can, from the very nature of the case, never attain. The spectacle of the

Starry Heavens may inspire admiration and awe, but cannot be said, except by way of metaphor, to inspire love and devotion. Humanity may inspire love and devotion, but does not, in ordinarily constituted minds, inspire either admiration or awe. If we wish to find these and other religious feelings concentrated on one object, transfusing and vivifying the bare precepts of morality, the combining power must be sought for in the doctrines of Supernatural Religion.

It might be said in reply, that while some of the feelings associated with a supernatural theology are doubtless absent from the 'religion of humanity,' these have purpose and significance chiefly in relation to the

doctrine of a future life, and to these persons, therefore, who see no ground for believing in the possibility of any such life, seem necessarily meaningless or mischievous. Here then is the point where I desire to join issue. The belief in a future state is one of the most striking—I will not say the most important—differences between phenomenal and supernatural religion. It is one upon which no agreement or compromise is possible. It admits of no gradations—of no less or more. It is true, or it is false. And my purpose is to contribute one or two observations towards a *qualitative* estimate of the immediate gain or loss to some of the highest interests of mankind, which would follow upon a

substitution of the Positivist for the Christian theory on the subject.

I say a qualitative estimate, because it is not easy to argue about a quantitative estimate in default of a kind of experience in which we are at present wholly deficient. The religion of humanity, divorced from any other religion, is professed by but a small and, in many respects, a peculiar sect. The cultivation of emotions at high tension towards humanity, deliberately dissociated from the cultivation of religious feeling towards God, has never yet been practised on a large scale. We have so far had only laboratory experiments. There has been no attempt to manufacture in bulk. And even if it had been other-

wise, the conclusion to be drawn must for a long time have remained doubtful. For the success of such attempts greatly depends on the character of the social medium in which they are carried on; and if, as I should hope, the existing social medium is favourable to the growth of philanthropic feelings, its character is largely due to the action of Christianity. It remains to be proved whether, if Christianity were destroyed, a 'religion of humanity' could long maintain for itself the atmosphere in which alone it could permanently flourish.

I make no attempt then to estimate the magnitude of the gain or loss which the destruction of a belief in Providence and a future life would

entail upon mankind. I merely endeavour to characterise one or two of the elements of which that gain or loss would be composed.

But in doing so I do not propose to count, or at least to consider, the feelings of satisfaction, or the reverse, with which, according to their temper or their creed, individuals may contemplate their personal destiny after death. My present business is with thoughts and emotions of a wider reference, and among these I count the effect which the belief that physical dissolution is not the destruction of consciousness, that death lets down the curtain at the end of the act, not at the end of the piece, has upon the mood in which we survey the darker

aspects of the world in which we live.

I. To say that the doctrine of Immortality provides us with a ready-made solution of the problem of evil, is of course absurd. If there be a problem, it is insoluble. Nevertheless there can be no doubt that it may profoundly modify the whole attitude of mind in which we are able to face the insistent facts of sin, suffering, and misery. I am no pessimist. I do not profess to weigh against one another the sorrows and the joys of humanity, and to conclude that it had been better for us had we never been born. Let any one try to perform such a calculation in his own case (about which he may be presumed to have exceptional

sources of information); let him, in the same spirit of unimpassioned inquiry in which he would carry on any other piece of scientific measurement, attempt to estimate how much of his life has been above and how much below that neutral line which represents the precise degree of well-being at which existence is neither a blessing nor a curse, and he will henceforth treat with derision all attempts to perform the same operation for the human race.

But though this be so, yet the sense of misery unrelieved, of wrongs unredressed, of griefs beyond remedy, of failure without hope, of physical pain so acute that it seems the one overmastering reality in a world of

shadows, of mental depression so deadly that it welcomes physical pain itself as a relief—these, and all the crookednesses and injustices of a crooked and unjust world, may well overload our spirits and shatter the springs of our energies, if to this world only we must restrict our gaze. For thus restricted the problem is hopeless. Let us dream what dreams we please about the future; let us paint it in hues of our own choosing; let us fashion for ourselves a world in which war has been abolished, disease mitigated, poverty rooted out; in which justice and charity determine every relation in life, and we shall still leave untouched a residue of irremediable ills—separation, decay,

weariness, death. This distant and doubtful millennium has its dark shadows: and then how distant and doubtful it is! The most intrepid prophet dare hardly say with assurance whether the gorgeous mountain shapes to which we are drifting be cloud or solid earth. And while the future happiness is doubtful, the present misery is certain. Nothing that humanity can enjoy in the future will make up for what it has suffered in the past: for those who will enjoy are not the same as those who have suffered: one set of persons is injured, another set will receive compensation.

Now I do not wish to be guilty of any exaggeration. It may freely be conceded that many persons exist to

whom the knowledge that there are wrongs to be remedied is a stimulus to remedying them, and is nothing more; who can abstract their minds from everything but the work in hand, and remain, like an experienced doctor, wholly undisturbed by the suffering of those whom they are endeavouring to relieve. But I am not sure that this class is common, or is getting commoner. The sensitiveness to social evils is increasing, and it is good that it should increase. But the good is not unmixed. In proportion as the general sympathy gets wider, as the social imagination gets more comprehensive and more responsive, so will the number of those increase who according to their temper

either rush frantically to the first quack remedy that presents itself, or, too clear-sighted to be sanguine, but not callous enough to be indifferent, yield themselves bondsmen to a sceptical despair. For the first of these classes I know not that anything can be done. There is no cure for stupidity. But for the second, the faith that what we see is but part, and a small part, of a general scheme which will complete the destiny, not merely of humanity, but (which is a very different thing) of every man, woman, and child born into the world, has supplied, and may again supply, consolation and encouragement, energy and hope.

II. It is true that we are some

times told that a system by which rewards and punishments are annexed in another world, to the practice of virtue or of vice in this one, appeals to the baser side of human nature. And comparisons are drawn between religions which appeal to such sanctions, and religions which do not, entirely to the disadvantage of the former. But this opinion, which lends itself naturally to much easy rhetorical treatment, is open to more than one objection. In the first place, it mistakes the position which the doctrine of future retribution holds in Christian theology, a position which, though real and important, is nevertheless a subordinate one in the hierarchy of religious motives. On this I do not

further dwell, since it obviously falls beyond the limit of my present subject. But in the second place, it seems altogether to mistake the true position of rational self-love in any sound scheme of practical morality.

Conceive for one moment what an infinitely better and happier world it would be if every action in it were directed by a reasonable desire for the agent's happiness! Excess of all kinds, drunkenness and its attendant ills, would vanish; disease would be enormously mitigated; nine-tenths of the petty vexations which embitter domestic life would be smoothed away; the competition for wealth would be lessened, for wealth would be rated at no more than the quantity

of pleasure which it is capable of purchasing for its possessor; the sympathetic emotions would be sedulously cultivated, as among those least subject to weariness and satiety; while self-sacrifice itself would be practised as the last refinement of a judicious luxury.

Now, love of self thus understood, we should be right in ranking infinitely lower among springs of action than the love of God or the love of man. But we should assuredly be utterly wrong in confounding it with self-indulgence, of which it is usually the precise opposite, or in describing it as in any respect base and degraded. The world suffers not because it has too much of it, but because it has too

little; not because it displaces higher motives, but because it is itself habitually displaced by lower ones. But though this be so, yet it must sometimes happen, however rarely, that rational love of self conflicts with the disinterested love of man, if results in this world alone be taken into account. It is only if we are permitted to assume another phase of existence in direct moral relation with this one, that the contradiction between these guiding principles of conduct can be solved certainly and universally in a higher harmony.

It is true that hopes are held out to us that a judicious manipulation of the latent forces of public opinion may supply us with a very efficient

substitute for Heaven and Hell, and may provide a method by which any action disagreeable to the community shall be made so intolerable to its perpetrator, that a perfect accord will be produced between individual and public interests. Now I am far indeed from asserting that this scheme (which oddly enough meets with especial favour from those who find something unworthy of the highest morality in the ordinary doctrine of future retribution) is wholly chimerical. The effect which the opinion of his habitual associates has upon the ordinary man, who is neither a hero nor a scoundrel, is almost limitless: and though I do not know that their approval has been able as yet to give

its object a foretaste of Heaven, their disapproval may without doubt be so organized as to supply its victim with a very sufficient anticipation of Hell. But is this a power which any sober man desires to see indefinitely increased and placed in irresponsible hands? Is there the slightest possibility that its operation would be limited to questions of morals? Would it not inevitably trespass upon individual freedom in neutral matters? Would it not crush out every germ of that 'tendency to variation' which is the very basis of development? and can we seriously regard it as an improvement in the scheme of the universe that Infinite Justice and Infinite Mercy should be dethroned

for the purpose of putting in their place an apotheosised Mrs. Grundy?

Dismissing then this substitute for future retribution as a remedy more dangerous than the disease, let us take stock of the position in which practical morality is left by the abolition of a future life. I have sketched for you what the world might be if it were governed solely by reasonable self-love; and a comparison between this picture and the reality should satisfy any one how feeble a motive self-love is compared with the work which it has to perform. In this lies the explanation of a fact which strangely enough has been used as an argument to show the worthlessness of Christianity as an instrument for moralizing

the world. How comes it, say these objectors, that in the ages when (as they read history) the sufferings and joys of eternity were present with special vividness to the mind of Christendom, more effect was not produced upon the lives of men; that licentiousness and devotion so often went hand in hand; that the terrors of Hell and the hopes of Heaven were powerless to stay the hand of violence and oppression? The answer is, that then, as now, the conviction that happiness lies along one road and misery along another, is seldom adequate to determine the path of the traveller. He will choose the wrong way, knowing it to be the wrong way, and well assured in his moments of

reflection that he is doing not merely what he knows to be wicked, but what he knows to be inexpedient. Surely, however, this is not only conformable to the facts of human nature, but to the doctrines of Christianity. If the practice of the noblest conduct is a fruit that can spring from the enlightened desire for happiness, then have theologians in all ages been notably mistaken. But it is not so. However closely in theory the actions prescribed by self-love may agree with those prescribed by benevolence, no man has ever succeeded in performing them from the former motive alone. No conviction, for instance, that unselfishness 'pays' has ever made any man habitually and

successfully unselfish. To promote the happiness of others solely as a means to our own, may be, and is, a perfectly logical and reasonable policy, but it is not a policy which human beings are capable of pursuing: and, as experience shows that the love of self must be barren unless merged in the love of others, so does the Church teach that rarely can this love of others be found in its highest perfection unless associated with the love of God. These three great principles — great, but not co-equal, distinct in themselves, harmonious in the actions they prescribe, gaining strength from a combination often so intimate as to defy analysis, are yet,

even in combination, insufficient to control the inordinate ambitions, desires, and passions over which they are *de jure*, but seldom *de facto*, the unquestioned rulers. How then are they dealt with by the Positivist creed? The love of self is *directly* weakened as a motive to virtue by the abolition of supernatural sanctions in another life. The love of others is *indirectly* weakened by the possibility of conflict between it and the love of self. The love of God is summarily suppressed. Surely those who can contemplate this result with equanimity must either be very indifferent to the triumph of morality, very ignorant of human nature, or very sanguine about the issues of the

struggle between the opposing forces of good and evil.

III. In considering, however, the effect of any creed on human actions, it is a great though a common error to limit our view to the bare substance of the morality it advocates, or to the direct method by which moral action is to be produced. Scarcely less important is the manner in which it presents the results of human effort to the imagination of men. The question, Is life worth living? when it is not a mere exclamation of weariness and satiety, means or should mean, Is there any object worth striving for, not merely as a matter of duty, but for its intrinsic greatness? Can we look at the labours of man from any point of

view which shall satisfy, not the conscience merely, but also the imagination? For if not, if the best we can say of life is that, though somewhat lacking in meaning, yet where circumstances are propitious, it is not otherwise than agreeable, then assuredly in our moments of reflection it would *not* seem worth living; and the more we contemplate it as a whole, the more we raise ourselves above the distractions of the passing moment, the less worth living will it seem.

This, I apprehend, would not be denied by any Positivist, but he would claim for his creed that it had an ideal object, vast enough to absorb the whole energies of mankind, and splendid enough to satisfy its highest

aspirations. In the work of building up a perfected humanity, every one may bear a part. None indeed can do much, yet all may do something. During his brief journey from nothingness to nothingness, each man may add his pebble to the slowly rising foundations of an ideal world, content to pass into eternal darkness if he has hastened by a moment the advent of the golden age which, though he will not live to see it, yet must surely come.

Though personally I prefer a system under which we may share the millennium to which we are invited to contribute, I should be the last to deny that conduct thus inspired has much in it that appeals to the

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highest imagination. But though the ideal is grand, is it also 'positive'? I have never been able to discover that there is any foundation in the known laws of nature for these flattering anticipations, or for any confident expectation that if perfection be attainable we are in the right way to attain it. Consider for a moment the complexity of human affairs: our ignorance of the laws which govern the growth of societies; the utter inadequacy of any power of calculation that we possess to apply with confidence our knowledge of those laws (such as it is) to the guidance of the contending forces by which the social organization is moved. The man who would sacrifice the good of the

next generation for the greater good of the generation next but one is a fool. He neglects an age of which he may know a little, for the sake of an age respecting which he can know nothing. He might, if he pleased, stumble along in the twilight; he prefers to adventure himself in the blackness of utter night. Yet what is a generation in the history of man? Nothing. And we, who cannot be sure whether our efforts will benefit or injure our grandchildren, are quietly to assume that we are in the way to contribute to the fortunes of the remotest representatives of the human race.

It will perhaps be said that if we do our best, all these things shall be

added unto us; and that without conscious contrivance on our part we shall be gently led towards the final consummation by that modern Providence the principle of Evolution. But I have never been fortunate enough to persuade myself that evolution in so far as it is a scientific doctrine, promises all or any of these good things. I am aware that occasionally evolutionists also find themselves among the prophets; and I take it that some of these anticipations are conceived in the spirit of prophecy rather than in that of natural philosophy. But what guidance in this matter is actually given us by science? We are taught that the successive developments of species have not been along

one main channel, but in countless branching streams, like those that intersect the delta of some great river. We also know that at some point or other on the way towards the development of a higher intelligence all these streams but one have been checked. The progenitors of man, and they alone, would seem to have hit off the precise line of flow, which could produce an Aristotle or a Newton. But because man, more fortunate than his cousins, has got thus far, is his future progress to be indefinite? If he differs from the animals only in degree, will not his fate only differ from theirs in degree also? He too will reach a point, if he has not reached it already, beyond which no variation will bring

with it increased intellectual grasp, increased vigour of imagination, increased moralization of will, increased capacity for social life. Nor does it seem to me that the study of history leads us to more encouraging results. There, too, progress has not been along one line of descent. Races and nations have in turn taken up the burden of advancing civilisation, borne it for a certain space, found it too heavy for them, and have laid it wearily down. Many peoples have degenerated, many have become stationary, and I am wholly at a loss to know why we—the group of Western nations—and we alone, may hope to escape the common destiny of man.

If we then regard the Universe in which we have to live as a mere web of connected phenomena, created for no object, informed by no purpose, stamped with no marks of design other than those which can be imitated by natural selection, I see no ground for the faith that all honest effort will work together for the production of a regenerate man and a perfected society. Such a conclusion cannot be drawn from the notion of God, for by hypothesis there is no God. It cannot be drawn from any general survey of the plan on which the world is framed, or of the end for which it is constructed: for the world is framed on no plan, nor is it constructed to carry out any end. It

cannot be drawn from a consideration of the histories of individual species or nations, for the inference to be drawn from these is that Nature has set bounds beyond which no alteration brings with it any material improvement. It cannot be deduced from what we know of man, for we have no knowledge of man more certain than that he is powerless consciously to bend towards the attainment of any remote ideal, forces whose interaction he is powerless to calculate or to comprehend. To me, therefore, it seems that the 'positive' view of the world must needs end in a chilling scepticism concerning the final worth of human effort, which can hardly fail to freeze and paralyse the warmest

enthusiasm and the most zealous energy.

IV. But I do not think that its effects in starving what I may perhaps be allowed to call the 'moral imagination' end here. There are some who hold that the wider range of vision given to us by history and science has diminished the credibility of a religion which comparative theology tells us is only one among thousands that have flourished in a world of which astronomy tells us that it is only one among indefinite millions scattered through limitless space. For my own part, the conclusion I draw from these undoubted facts is precisely the opposite one. Comte was, I think, well advised when, in his later

writings, he discouraged research into matters remote from obvious human interest, on the ground that such research is inimical to the progress of the Positive faith. Not Christianity, but Positivism shrinks and pales in the light of increasing knowledge. For, while the Positive faith professes to base itself upon science, its emotions centre in humanity, and we are therefore treated to the singular spectacle of a religion in which each great advance in the doctrines which support it dwarfs still further the dignity of the object for which it exists. For what is man, considered merely as a natural object among other natural objects? Time was when the fortunes of his tribe were enough to

exhaust the energies and to bound the imagination of the primitive sage. The gods' peculiar care, the central object of an attendant universe, that for which the sun shone and the dew fell, to which the stars in their courses ministered; it drew its origin in the past from divine ancestors, and might by divine favour be destined to an indefinite existence of success and triumph in the future.

These ideas represent no early stage in human thought, but we have left them far behind. The family, the tribe, the nation, are no longer enough to absorb our interests. Man, past, present, and future, lays claim to our devotion. What then can we say of him?

Man, so far as natural science by itself is able to teach us, is no longer the final cause of the universe, the heaven-descended heir of all the ages. His very existence is an accident, his story a brief and discreditable episode in the life of one of the meanest of the planets. Of the combination of causes which first converted a piece or pieces of unorganized jelly into the living progenitors of humanity, science indeed, as yet, knows nothing. It is enough that from such beginnings Famine, Disease, and Mutual Slaughter, fit nurses of the future lord of creation, have gradually evolved, after infinite travail, a race with conscience enough to know that it is vile, and intelligence enough to know that

it is insignificant. We survey the past and see that its history is of blood and tears, of helpless blundering, of wild revolt, of stupid acquiescence, of empty aspirations. We sound the future, and learn that after a period, long compared with the individual life, but short indeed compared with the divisions of time open to our investigation, the energies of our system will decay, the glory of the sun will be dimmed, and the earth, tideless and inert, will no longer tolerate the race which has for a moment disturbed its solitude. Man will go down into the pit, and all his thoughts will perish. The uneasy consciousness, which in this obscure corner has for a brief space broken the contented

silence of the Universe, will be at rest. Matter will know itself no longer. Imperishable monuments and immortal deeds, death itself, and love stronger than death, will be as though they had never been. Nor will anything that is be better or be worse for all that the labour, genius, devotion, and suffering of man have striven through countless generations to effect.

Now this Positivist eschatology, like any other eschatology, need of course have little obvious or direct bearing on the great mass of ordinary everyday interests and emotions. It need not overshadow every thought and action of him who accepts it, any more than the knowledge that

death must come some time, and may come soon, thrusts itself obtrusively into the business and enjoyment of the average man. But this does not mean that its influence can be disregarded. One of the objects of the 'religion of humanity,' and it is an object beyond all praise, is to stimulate the imagination till it lovingly embraces the remotest fortunes of the whole human family. But in proportion as this end is successfully attained, in proportion as we are taught by this or any other religion to neglect the transient and the personal, and to count ourselves as labourers for that which is universal and abiding, so surely must the increasing range which science is giving

to our vision over the times and spaces of the material universe, and the decreasing importance of the place which man is seen to occupy in it, strike coldly on our moral imagination, if so be that the material universe is all we have to do with. It is no answer to say that scientific discovery cannot alter the moral law, and that so long as the moral law is unchanged our conduct need be modified by no opinions as to the future destiny of this planet or its inhabitants. This contention, whether true or not, is irrelevant. All developed religions, and all philosophies which aspire to take the place of religion, Lucretius as well as St. Paul, give us some theory as to the destiny of man and his

relation to the sum of things. My contention is that every such religion and every such philosophy, so long as it insists on regarding man as merely a phenomenon among phenomena, a natural object among other natural objects, is condemned by science to failure as an effective stimulus to high endeavour. Love, pity, and endurance it may indeed leave with us: and this is well. But it so dwarfs and impoverishes the ideal end of human effort, that though it may encourage us to die with dignity, it hardly permits us to live with hope.

I have now endeavoured briefly to indicate certain salient points in which, as I think, Positivism must, even within the limits of mundane experi-

ence, prove inferior as a moralising agent to Christianity. Of the inmost essence of Christianity, of the doctrines dealing with the personal relations between God and man, in which it differs not merely from Positivism, but from all other forms of religion, I have said little. For Positivism, not Christianity, is my subject, and over this region of religious consciousness Positivism claims no sway. I have contented myself with enquiring which of these two is in truth the better 'religion of humanity;' which is the religion most fitted, in the face of advancing knowledge, to concentrate in the service of man those high emotions and far-reaching hopes from which the moral law, as a practical system, draws

nourishment and strength. That such a method of treatment is essentially incomplete, is of course obvious. It arbitrarily isolates, and exclusively deals with, but a small fraction of the question at issue between supernaturalism and phenomenalism. It leaves out of account the greatest question of all—namely, the question of comparative proof, and directs attention only to the less august problem of comparative advantage. Such a limitation of treatment would in any case be imposed by the character of the occasion, but I am not sure that it is not intrinsically useful. A philosophy of belief, I do not mean of religious belief exclusively or even principally, but of all

belief, has yet to be constructed. I do not know that its foundations are yet laid; nor are they likely to be laid by Positivist thinkers, on whose minds it does not for the most part seem yet to have dawned that such a philosophy is in any way required. Until some progress is made in this work I must adhere to an opinion which I have elsewhere defended, that much current controversy about the possibility of miracles, about the evidence for design, about what is commonly, though very absurdly, described as the 'conflict between science and religion,' can at best be only provisional. But when the time comes at which mankind shall have attained some coherent method of

testing the validity of those opinions respecting the natural and the spiritual worlds on which in their best moments they desire to act, then I hazard the guess, since to guesses we are at present confined, that adaptation to the moral wants and aspirations of humanity will not be regarded as wholly alien to the problems over which so many earnest minds are at present disquieting themselves in vain.

But even apart from the question of relative proof, it may be said that the comparison between Christianity and Positivism has been very incompletely worked out. This is true, but let it be noted that the incompleteness of treatment is un-

favourable, not to Positivism, but to Christianity. We have compared Positivism where it is thought to be strongest, with Christianity where it is thought to be weakest. And if the result of the comparison even there has been unfavourable to Positivism, how will the account stand if every element in Christianity be taken into consideration? The 'religion of humanity' seems specially fitted to meet the tastes of that comparatively small and prosperous class, who are unwilling to leave the dry bones of Agnosticism wholly unclothed with any living tissue of religious emotion, and who are at the same time fortunate enough to be able to persuade themselves that they are contributing,

or may contribute, by their individual efforts to the attainment of some great ideal for mankind. But what has it to say to the more obscure multitude who are absorbed, and well nigh overwhelmed, in the constant struggle with daily needs and narrow cares; who have but little leisure or inclination to consider the precise rôle they are called on to play in the great drama of 'humanity,' and who might in any case be puzzled to discover its interest or its importance? Can it assure them that there is no human being so insignificant as not to be of infinite worth in the eyes of Him who created the Heavens, or so feeble but that his action may have consequence of infinite moment long after this material

system shall have crumbled into nothingness? Does it offer consolation to those who are in grief, hope to those who are bereaved, strength to the weak, forgiveness to the sinful, rest to those who are weary and heavy laden? If not, then, whatever be its merits, it is no rival to Christianity. It cannot penetrate and vivify the inmost life of ordinary humanity. There is in it no nourishment for ordinary human souls, no comfort for ordinary human sorrow, no help for ordinary human weakness. Not less than the crudest irreligion does it leave us men divorced from all communion with God, face to face with the unthinking energies of nature which gave us birth, and

into which, if supernatural religion be indeed a dream, we must after a few fruitless struggles be again resolved.

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